

Research Process: The Ins and Outs

Objectives: Understand the research process, how to begin researching, and what resources are available

The Research Process

Pick one person or family to begin researching

- Choosing one person or family to research will help with maintaining focus and will increase productivity
- After choosing who you'd like to start with, make sure to analyze the dates, places, and sources. This will allow you to determine what needs to be learned and set reasonable and achievable goals.
- Setting simple goals based on what you know will help as a starting point. It is easier to have success when your goals are pointed and simple. Examples of good goals include: "Determine when this individual immigrated" OR "determine if this couple had children." This is better than "research John Doe"

When we know what we want to find, we can determine what records will be most helpful to search. It is also important to remember that goals can change or be adjusted as research begins.

Start with what you know

- Check with other relatives or people who have been researching this person to see what they may know about the person or family you'd like to begin researching. This will prevent any duplicate research and start you off with some knowledge of what may be a good starting point.
- Analyze all sources attached to those you are researching. Ask yourself if the source makes sense to be attached to that particular individual, are they the same person? Seeing what you already have will allow you to see what else can still be discovered.

Determine what may be available

- Use the FamilySearch Wiki to determine what records are available for the particular areas you are researching in. The wiki often will link to sites that may have records or information as to where the records can be accessed.
- Use the FamilySearch catalog to find collections of records, books, and other resources that FamilySearch has either online or at the Family History Library.
- There are so many other sites that may have the records you are searching for. Check the catalogs for sites such as Ancestry to determine what else may be available.

Focus on specific record types

- Depending on where you are researching, you will often begin by searching for particular record types. In the United States and Canada it is often helpful to start by finding the individual you are researching in every census they may be listed in. The census shows a glimpse of the family and individual every ten years usually and can give excellent information.
- Another type of record that is helpful are referred to as vital records. These records are any type of record that records births, marriages, or deaths. These records can be tricky to find because different places will have different availability, but they are very helpful.

Keep a research log and good notes

- Your research log can look completely different from someone else's; however, it is important to record where you were searching and what you found. This will prevent duplicate searches in the future and provides one place for you to record your thoughts and findings.
- Research logs are also a great place to keep citations and links to documents you do find. This will allow you to quickly return to what you found in the future.

Use all available tools

- FamilySearch has a great Help Center that will give suggestions on how to begin researching, and how to do different aspects of family history. It also provides access to the FamilySearch community where there are groups that allow you to ask and answer questions.
- Using other websites is so helpful in doing research. FamilySearch has an amazing collection of records, but it doesn't always have everything.
- Here are a few other websites you can explore to learn more about your family (there are many more!):
 - o Ancestry.com
 - o MyHeritage.com
 - o Findmypast.com
 - o Findagrave.com
 - o Geneanet.org
 - o Newspapers.com

Helpful Strategies

- Start from a known date and work either forwards or backwards.

It is easier to gradually work from a piece of known information than to pick a random year and hope you find a record. It's like starting with the edge pieces when doing a puzzle
- Work with others and discuss your findings. This provides an opportunity to voice what may be a difficult research question.
- Search with known relationships. This helps to determine the person you find in the records is actually the person you are searching for. There may be multiple John Smiths living in Boston, Massachusetts, but fewer John Smiths in Boston married to Lavinia Buehler.
- Don't just do broad general searches

It is easier to filter through 68 results than 2,364 results.
- Join community pages, societies, and groups

Often if you have questions about anything in particular someone else has also had this question
- Think of possible name variations